



Memorial Day Holiday Period Traffic Fatality Estimate, 2009

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Holiday period definition

Memorial Day is May 30 but it is observed on the last Monday in May. It is always a 3.25-day weekend consisting of Friday evening, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. In 2009, the holiday period extends from 6:00 p.m. Friday, May 22, to 11:59 p.m. Monday, May 25.¹

Method and results

The objective is to estimate the number of deaths that will occur in traffic crashes during the Memorial Day holiday period based on data available several weeks before the holiday. The estimate developed here includes all traffic deaths from crashes that occur during the holiday period.²

The general procedure involves three steps. First, historical data are used to determine the average fraction holiday fatalities are of total deaths for the month. Second, total traffic deaths for the coming month in which the holiday falls are estimated using a time series forecasting model. Third, the projected total for the month is multiplied by the fraction to obtain the holiday estimate.

Holiday as percent of month. Total May deaths are the estimates published in *Injury Facts*® (formerly *Accident Facts*®) the year after the year of the estimate (e.g., the May 2007 estimate as published in the 2009 edition of *Injury Facts*®). This figure is used, rather than a revised estimate or the National Center for Health Statistics final count, because it closely approximates the level of accuracy that the time series estimate will give for total monthly deaths in the current year. Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) data were used to obtain deaths during the holiday periods.

Table 1 shows the total traffic fatalities for the month of May and fatalities from crashes that occurred during the holiday period. Over the six years 2002-2007, fatalities from crashes during the Memorial Day holiday period averaged 12.64% of the total fatalities in May.

Time series model and projection. A time series model was developed to forecast an estimate of total traffic deaths for May 2009. An Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) model was constructed based on 48 months of traffic deaths recorded from April 2005 through March 2009. An ARIMA model was chosen because of the seasonal pattern in traffic deaths. The model was developed using the SPSS/PC+ Version 5.0 statistical computer package. The model forecasts total traffic fatalities for May 2009 to be 2,899.

Holiday estimate. Multiplying the projected total fatalities by the fraction obtained in the first step gives an estimate of 366 traffic fatalities from crashes during the holiday period.

Confidence interval

There is uncertainty associated with any estimate. The 90% confidence interval for the estimate of total May deaths is 2,637 to 3,188. If we assume that the fraction of May deaths that occur during the Memorial Day period is normally distributed, then the 90% confidence interval for that fraction is 12.27% to 13.01%. Combining these two gives the confidence interval for the Memorial Day period estimate: 324 to 415 traffic deaths.

Nonfatal disabling injuries

Based on the current disabling-injury to death ratio of 53:1, and rounded to the nearest hundred, the estimate of the number of nonfatal disabling injuries that will result from crashes during the holiday period is 19,400 with a range of 17,100 to 22,000.

Holiday comparison

A frequently asked question is "How much more dangerous is travel over the Memorial Day holiday?" There are two aspects of this question that must be considered. First, compared to what? And, second, what about changes in the amount of driving?

We chose to compare the holiday to periods of similar length before and after the holiday. Specifically, from 6:00 p.m. Friday to 11:59 p.m. Monday of the weeks immediately before and after the Memorial Day weekend. Table 2 shows the fatality data from FARS for 2002 to 2007 for comparable weekends. The average number of traffic deaths during Memorial Day over those six years is 10.0% higher than the average number of traffic deaths during the comparison periods (489 vs. 444 deaths). The difference between these two means *is* statistically significant at the 5% level.

The second question concerns changes in the amount of travel, or exposure. We know of no data system that tracks changes in vehicle miles of travel by day of the year on a national basis. Lacking an objective measure of exposure change, we assume that travel is greater on holiday weekends than on nonholiday weekends.

If the assumed travel increase exceeds 10.0%, then the risk of dying in a traffic crash during the Memorial Day holiday period is less than during comparable nonholiday periods. If the travel increase is less than 10.0% or if travel is actually lower, then the risk of dying on the holiday is greater than during comparable periods.

Arnold and Cerrelli (1987) also examined the variation in fatalities during holiday periods.³ They used FARS data for 1975-1985 to determine average daily fatalities for each day of the week in each month (e.g., Mondays in May). For the Memorial Day holiday period, they found that fatalities rose 32% on Memorial Day itself, but were normal on the other days of the holiday period.

Evaluation

Table 3 compares the actual FARS counts with the Council's estimates for all holidays for which data are available. Sixty-seven of the 77 actual counts fall within the 90% confidence interval of the estimate.

Notes

1. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration extends the holiday period to 5:59 a.m. the following morning in its published tabulations of holiday deaths.
2. This differs from holiday estimates published by the Council in 1991 and earlier years. Comparisons should *not* be made between the holiday data and estimates shown here and holiday data and estimates published in 1991 and earlier years.
3. Arnold, R., & Cerrelli, E.C. (1987). *Holiday Effect on Traffic Fatalities*. DOT HS 807 115. Springfield, VA: National Technical Information Service.

**Table 1. Traffic Deaths During the Memorial Day Period
as a Percent of Total May Traffic Deaths.**

YEAR	MAY	MEMORIAL DAY PERIOD	PERCENT
2002	3,710	484	13.05%
2003	3,760	472	12.55%
2004	4,150	496	11.95%
2005	3,890	512	13.16%
2006	3,860	493	12.77%
2007	3,830	475	12.40%
<i>6-year avg.</i>	<i>3,867</i>	<i>489</i>	<i>12.64%</i>

Source: *Injury Facts* and FARS.

**Table 2. Traffic Deaths During Memorial Day Period
and Equivalent Nonholiday Periods.**

YEAR	MEMORIAL DAY PERIOD	EQUIVALENT PERIODS	
		BEFORE	AFTER
2002	484	431	467
2003	472	443	407
2004	496	443	414
2005	512	488	458
2006	493	465	433
2007	475	478	402
<i>6-year avg.</i>	<i>489</i>	<i>444</i>	

Source: FARS.

Table 3. Holiday Estimate Evaluation

YEAR	ESTIMATE	90% C. I.	ACTUAL	YEAR	ESTIMATE	90% C. I.	ACTUAL
New Year's Day				Labor Day			
1995.....		(no estimate)		1995.....	512	457 – 574	490
1996.....	392	331 – 461	414	1996.....	544	494 – 598	508
1997.....	184	124 – 254	176	1997.....	492	426 – 566	485
1998.....	514	453 – 581	532	1998.....	498	447 – 554	447
1999.....	391	348 – 439	349	1999.....	468	422 – 518	469
2000.....	364	322 – 411	* 458	2000.....	481	430 – 538	514
2001.....	399	359 – 443	* 338	2001.....	474	420 – 533	432
2002.....	533	467 – 608	554	2002.....	474	413 – 542	536
2003.....	184	140 – 235	203	2003.....	488	429 – 555	490
2004.....	524	450 – 609	549	2004.....	486	421 – 558	480
2005.....	392	338 – 453	449	2005.....	475	420 – 537	500
2006.....	399	347 – 457	432	2006.....	533	477 – 595	487
2007.....	405	354 – 463	387	2007.....	490	440 – 544	508
Memorial Day				Thanksgiving Day			
1995.....	456	381 – 543	471	1995.....	527	465 – 596	519
1996.....	478	411 – 552	494	1996.....	528	465 – 597	570
1997.....	473	408 – 546	498	1997.....	541	480 – 609	554
1998.....	470	419 – 528	* 383	1998.....	541	485 – 603	586
1999.....	470	414 – 534	494	1999.....	500	441 – 566	* 567
2000.....	461	404 – 525	451	2000.....	497	432 – 570	497
2001.....	468	419 – 523	499	2001.....	532	455 – 619	580
2002.....	498	423 – 582	484	2002.....	575	493 – 667	527
2003.....	464	396 – 542	472	2003.....	544	459 – 642	544
2004.....	476	409 – 551	496	2004.....	556	476 – 646	556
2005.....	471	410 – 540	512	2005.....	610	505 – 735	605
2006.....	541	487 – 601	493	2006.....	555	500 – 615	* 623
2007.....	497	450 – 548	475	2007.....	564	499 – 635	542
Independence Day				Christmas Day			
1995.....	636	553 – 731	631	1995.....	422	351 – 502	* 342
1996.....	653	580 – 734	609	1996.....	145	113 – 182	136
1997.....	469	411 – 535	492	1997.....	563	458 – 680	466
1998.....	498	448 – 552	458	1998.....	406	350 – 468	354
1999.....	503	446 – 567	499	1999.....	369	316 – 428	* 456
2000.....	645	578 – 719	683	2000.....	359	300 – 424	419
2001.....	198	144 – 260	173	2001.....	522	417 – 641	575
2002.....	648	565 – 743	662	2002.....	160	131 – 193	* 114
2003.....	520	449 – 602	500	2003.....	529	438 – 636	488
2004.....	522	451 – 602	502	2004.....	440	356 – 536	370
2005.....	498	444 – 557	* 565	2005.....	443	352 – 546	383
2006.....	751	680 – 828	* 629	2006.....	415	332 – 507	379
2007.....	203	160 – 251	184	2007.....	497	424 – 579	454

Source: Estimates from National Safety Council; actual counts from FARS.

* = outside of 90% confidence interval.